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Curricular Assessments in South Carolina by Teachers of Students with Severe Disabilities

Martha Jill Bardin Christmus

CURRICULAR ASSESSMENTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA BY TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES

by

Martha Jill Bardin Christmus

Bachelor of Arts
Clemson University, 2008

Master of Education
University of South Carolina, 2012

Master of Education
University of South Carolina, 2014

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Accepted by:

Erik Drasgow, Major Professor

Anthony Plotner, Committee Member

Mitchell Yell, Committee Member

Joe Flora, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

DEDICATION

This dissertation first and foremost is dedicated to my Lord and my Savior, Jesus Christ. All that I have and all that I am, I owe it all to Him. Secondly, this dissertation is dedicated to my family. To my wonderful and completely supportive husband, Nathan. Without you, this accomplishment would not have been possible. You have been there every step of the way. This work is also dedicated to children Anna, Kate, and the baby on the way. If you believe in yourself, anything is possible.

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ABSTRACT

Students with severe disabilities are often taught the same academic curriculum that is not differentiated to meet his or her unique needs in self-contained classrooms with little or no opportunity to participate in the school and other community environments where non-disabled individuals live, work, learn, and play. It is important that their curriculum prepare them to participate in the school and community environment like their same age peers. The assessment of a students' unique needs and the environment should guide his or her curriculum development and not a curriculum sequence. Students with severe disabilities should be taught the skills necessary to function in their community so that they can be contributing members of society. The purpose of the study is to a determine the teachers' perspectives on a) the most valuable sources of information to determine the present levels of performance for students with severe disabilities; and b) how they are utilizing assessment data to develop curriculum for students with severe disabilities. Results from the study found that teachers of students with severe disabilities utilize and find observations of students in the special education classroom as the most important assessment method. There have not been any studies conducted to investigate if teachers of students with severe disabilities are using ecological inventories. My study provides evidence that ecological analyses are not being used to assess the necessary skills students with severe disabilities to be successful in their community or to plan for their instruction. There is also evidence that suggests teachers may not understand how to use ecological inventories. Additionally, my study

provides evidence that teachers of students with severe disabilities rely on the student's developmental level when writing present levels of academic achievement and functional performance for student IEPs.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The demands of the 21st century require individuals to be prepared to enter a college, a career, and to enter society (Sloan, 2012). Schools provide students opportunities to reach their fullest potential and to grow socially, emotionally, expressively, physically, and intellectually within systems of families, schools, communities, and our larger society (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2007). High expectations must be set for students by engaging them in challenging curriculum and assessment in order for all students to reach their fullest potential.

Less than fifty years ago, students with disabilities were not served in schools alongside their same-aged peers. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), retitled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, was the law that was put into place to allow students with disabilities access to public schools. Schools became legally obligated to educate students with disabilities. One component of the IDEA is that all students with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). The purpose of a FAPE is to ensure that all students with disabilities are provided with a free public education that is appropriate to their unique individual needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. Additionally, the law requires instruction alongside their same-aged peers when appropriate.

The individualized education program (IEP) is the heart of the student's FAPE. The IEP is a process and a legal document, which is developed by an IEP team and drives a student's educational program (Bateman & Linden, 2012; Capizzi, 2008; Christle & Yell, 2010; Yell, 2012; Yesseldyke & Algozzine, 2006). The IEP is a document that contains information that includes the student's educational goals and how progress will be measured towards those goals. The IEP team determines the student's educational goals and must meet at least once per year to review the student's IEP (Yell, 2019).

The present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) are the starting point for the development of the rest of the IEP (Yell, 2019). The PLAAFP is the baseline for the development of the IEP because it describes where the student is currently functioning (Bateman & Linden, 2012). Academic and functional assessments guide the IEP team in developing the student's PLAAFP statements.

For a student with a severe disability, IEP team needs to assess the demands of the student's current and future environments (Browder, Root, Wood, & Allison, 2016). The educator assesses how the student performs in those environments and the skills that the student needs to be successful. The objective baseline data must be provided in the PLAAFP in each area of need for the student. The baseline data must be specific to the skill or behavior that is being measured. It must be measurable and objective, so that others can measure it and get the same results (Bateman & Herr, 2003).

Once the baseline data on current student performance has been generated, the IEP team must develop goals. The IEP goals must directly correlate with the student's needs as set forth in the PLAAFP statements. The goals are the student's learning outcomes for the year. The annual IEP goals are a stepping stones eventually preparing

the student for his or her future. The IEP also includes special education and related services that prepare the student for this outcome.

To determine the student's curriculum, the IEP team must consider the desired outcomes for the student to be successful in current and future environments (Browder et al., 2016). The IDEA requires that the IEP must be designed to enable a student to make progress appropriate in light of his or her circumstances (*Endrew F. v. Douglas Count School District*, 2017). According to the IDEA, the purpose of special education is to give students a FAPE that is designed to meet the students' unique needs and prepare the student for further education, employment, and independent living. The student's curriculum, therefore, must prepare the student for life after school. To do so, it is essential to determine what is important to the individual and his or her family to create a plan that will be meaningful to the student (Browder et al., 2016). By involving the individual and the family, there is an increased probability that the outcomes are socially valid or meaningful for the individual with the disability (Browder et al., 2016).

Rationale and Purpose

Students with severe disabilities are often taught the same academic curriculum that is not individualized to meet his or her unique needs in self-contained classrooms with little or no opportunity to participate in the school and other community environments where non-disabled individuals live, work, learn, and play (Kleinert et al., 2015). It is important that their curriculum prepare them to participate in the school and community environment like their same-age peers. The assessment of the students' unique needs and the environment should guide his or her curriculum development and not a curriculum sequence. Students with severe disabilities should be taught the skills

necessary to function in their community so that they can be contributing members of society. Students with severe disabilities vary in characteristics, so curricula should vary based on the individual's unique needs (AAMR, 2002).

To appropriately program for a student, educators should identify the discrepancies between the student's current level of functioning and the demands the individual will face in inclusive schools, communities, and classroom (AAMR, 2002; Giangreco, Dymond, & Shogren, 2016). Professionals should never stop challenging the capabilities of the individual. Individuals with severe disabilities share a basic human trait with other individuals: All individuals are capable of learning, and they have a right to be taught the skills necessary to participate in the community with their same age peers (Brown, McDonnell, & Snell, 2016). Appropriate curriculum enables individuals with severe disabilities an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities (Brown et al., 2016). With appropriate curriculum, students with severe disabilities can be successful in inclusive environments alongside their same-age peers (Brown, et al., 2016).

In South Carolina, the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) provided funding to districts to purchase instructional materials for teachers of students with severe disabilities, such as Attainment and Unique Learning Systems (J. Payne, personal communication, March 7, 2017 and May 11, 2017). These instructional materials were created to teach students with severe disabilities academic grade level standards and provide the teachers with a way to teach English language arts, math, science and social studies to students with severe disabilities in their self-contained classroom. Teaching students with severe disabilities academic skills in a separate location from their same age peers does not prepare the student to participate in the school and their local

community (Brown, McDonnell, & Snell, 2016). Students need to be taught the skills needed to be successful in the community, so they can be successful when they exit school (Kearns et al., 2011).

The purpose of this study is to a determine the teachers' perspectives on a) the most valuable sources of information to use in determining the PLAAFP statements for students with severe disabilities; and b) how they are using assessment data to develop curriculum for students with severe disabilities. The study will address the following questions:

1. What assessment methods are used most often by teachers to determine curricula for their students with severe disabilities?
2. What assessment methods are most important to teachers to determine curricula for their students with severe disabilities?
3. What information do teachers use to write PLAAFP statements for the IEPs of students with severe disabilities?
4. What information is most important to teachers in developing PLAAFP statements for the IEPs of students with severe disabilities?
5. How do teachers who actively use ecological inventories and who do not actively use ecological inventories differ in characteristics?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of my dissertation is to evaluate the current state of curricular assessments for students with severe disabilities in the state of South Carolina. Curricular assessments play a vital role in determining the students' instructional program. Once the student is assessed, the teacher must use that assessment to plan for the student's instructional program. For students with severe disabilities, it is vital to plan for their future after school. Each student's IEP should be continuously preparing the student to be an active participant in society. To evaluate the curricular assessments used for students with severe disabilities, I will survey the teachers of students with severe disabilities in the state of South Carolina.

In this chapter, I provide a review of the literature on educating students with severe disabilities. The first section describes the characteristics of students with severe disabilities. The second section contains the legal and philosophical basis for their education, including the development of IEPs for students with severe disabilities. The third section describes the current post-secondary outcomes for students with severe disabilities and the evolution of academic and functional curriculum for students with severe disabilities. The next section describes assessment for students with severe disabilities, including assessment for initial identification and eligibility of special education services, assessment for curriculum development, and monitoring progress. Finally, I will discuss the current state of curricular assessments in South Carolina.

Characteristics of Students with Severe Disabilities

Students with severe disabilities or multiple disabilities are a heterogeneous group of students. Therefore, a homogenous assessment will not best capture their individual capabilities. Students with severe or multiple disabilities are commonly referred to as students with "severe disabilities" in the literature (see, for example, Agran, 2011). Sometimes students with severe disabilities are described as having a low-incidence disability or a significant cognitive disability (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2016; Giangreco et al., 2016; NCSC, 2016). Although students with severe disabilities are not a defined disability category, the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC, 2016) found that the majority of students with severe disabilities are categorized as having an intellectual disability, autism, or multiple disabilities.

Students with severe disabilities have significant delays in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior (Giangreco et al., 2016). Intellectual functioning refers to the individual's general mental capacity and involves the individual's ability to learn, reason, problem solve and comprehend (American Association on Intellectual Disabilities [AAIDD], 2018; Lowrey, Drasgow, Renzaglia, & Chezan, 2007). Adaptive behavior refers to the skills the individual needs to function in his or her daily life and involves skills such as social skills, personal independence, and coping skills (AAIDD, 2018; Lowrey et al., 2007). Students with severe disabilities have varying disability characteristics, capabilities and educational needs, and focusing on their deficits provide little information about their capabilities (Giangreco et al., 2016). Instead, the focus has shifted to focus on the demands of the environment and the person's current level of functioning (Giangreco et al., 2016).

Philosophical Basis of Education for Students with Severe Disabilities

Students with severe disabilities have the same human rights as any other individual. This philosophy is known as normalization. Normalization is the belief that students with disabilities should have a normal life like their same-age peers (Nirje, 1969; Renzaglia, Karvonen, Drasgow, & Stoxen, 2003; Wolfensberger, 1972). The principles of normalization are rooted in the concept of equality, quality of life and human rights (Renzaglia et al., 2003). The purpose of normalization is to create a lifestyle where the individual is an active participant in his or her life rather than a passive observer (Renzaglia et al., 2003).

Teachers must design their curriculum around this philosophy if there is a chance that the individual will have a meaningful quality of life. A typical student participates in courses to prepare them for further education, eats lunch independently with his or her same age peers, and participates in all other related activities with their same age peers. Curricular assessments guide the teacher on determining the skills that are important for the individual.

Legal Basis of Education for Students with Severe Disabilities

Prior to 1975, individuals with severe disabilities were often locked in institutions away from their same-aged peers (see, Blatt & Kaplan, 1966; Neier, 1980). The quality of life for students with severe disabilities was subpar. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was signed into law mandating that students with disabilities covered by the law receive a public education that was appropriate for their needs. The ultimate purpose of this law was to mandate the education of students with disabilities, thereby improving the quality of life for them. Schools were legally

obligated to provide special education and related services to eligible students with disabilities and to allow them access to the same curriculum as their same age peers.

In order to ensure schools served these students, EAHCA put several requirements in place and tied it to funding. The heart of EAHCA was that students with disabilities would be granted a FAPE (Yell, 2019). A FAPE is defined as special education and related services that

A. Are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge,
B. Meet standards of the State educational agency,
C. Include an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary school education in the state involved, and
D. Are provided in conformity with the individualized education program (IEP; IDEA, 20 U.S.C., § 1401[a][18])

The purpose of a FAPE was to ensure that all students with disabilities were provided with special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living (Bateman & Linden, 2012; Christle & Yell, 2010; *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School System*, 2017; Yell, Katsiyannis, Ennis, Losinski, & Christle, 2016).

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

The heart of the student's FAPE is their IEP. The IEP is both a process and a document developed by an IEP team that drives a student's educational programming (Bateman & Linden, 2012; Capizzi, 2008; Christle & Yell, 2010; Yell, 2019; Yesseldyke & Algozzine, 2006). The IEP is a document that contains information that includes the

student's educational goals and how progress will be measured towards those goals. The IEP team determines the student's educational goals and must meet at least once per year to review the student's IEP (Yell, 2019). Moreover, a student's IEP includes the special education and related services that will enable a student to make progress appropriate in light of his or her circumstances (*Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, 2017).

Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP).

The PLAAFP statements are the starting point for the development of the rest of the IEP (Yell, 2019). In the PLAAFP statements, the IEP team describes how the child's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children; IDEA 34 CFR 300.320(a)(1)). The PLAAFP is the baseline for the development of the IEP (Bateman & Linden, 2006). Academic and functional assessments guide the development of a student's PLAAFP which must address all of the unique needs of a student. The IEP team must use the assessment information to determine where the student is currently functioning in his or her environment.

Objective baseline data must be provided in the PLAAFP in each area need for the student. Some examples of baseline data include percent of correct responses or the number of times a behavior occurs (South Carolina Department of Education [SCDE], 2013). The baseline data must be specific to the skill or behavior that is being measured. It must be measurable and objective, so that others can measure it and get the same results (SCDE, 2013).

Once the baseline data has been generated, the IEP team may develop a student's measurable annual goals. The IEP goals must directly correlate with the student's

baseline data. The goals are the student's learning outcomes for the year. The annual IEP goals are stepping stones to prepare the student for his or her future environment.

Least restrictive environment.

After a student's curriculum has been developed, the student's placement must be determined by the student's placement team, which is usually the IEP team. The placement is based on the student's IEP. The IDEA mandates that students with disabilities be provided a FAPE alongside their peers without disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE; Yell, 2019). The LRE requirement was put in place so individuals with disabilities could be educated alongside their same age, nondisabled peers when possible. The IDEA (2004) requires that

> to the maximum extent possible, children with disabilities including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and (ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA, 34 CFR 300.114)

Removal from the general education setting should only occur when an appropriate education cannot be provided even with supplementary aids and services.

Current Post-High School Outcomes for Students with Severe Disabilities

The purpose of education is that all individuals achieve the desired learning outcomes and then are later successful adults (Jackson, Ryndak, & Wehmeyer, 2008). Most students with severe disabilities, however, continue to exit school without the skills necessary that lead to meaningful employment (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012). Very few adults with severe disabilities have access to paid work experiences (Winsor et al.,

2017). Individuals with severe disabilities that do have access to work experience are paid very little and are often in segregated settings (Winsor et al., 2017).

For students with severe disabilities, their curriculum must prepare them for life after school. Individuals with severe disabilities can be taught the skills to be successful in their adult lives and can be meaningfully employed (Kearns et al., 2011). Educators must assess the current and future environment to determine what skills the student needs to be successful. The assessment of the future environment will lead to the development of a curriculum that will prepare the student for meaningful employment and to be a contributing member of society.

Curriculum Evolution for Students with Severe Disabilities

For students with severe disabilities, the IEP team should be planning for life in the community, thus preparing the student for a better quality of life. The ultimate goal of education is to make all students successful in society. Students with severe disabilities must be taught how to participate in their community with their same age peers.

When EAHCA was enacted in 1975, students with disabilities were required to begin attending school with their same-age peers. Teachers did not know what to teach students with severe disabilities because often these students were not enrolled in schools (Browder et al., 2004). Many educators therefore adopted the developmental approach to teaching students with severe disabilities. The developmental approach involved adapting infant and early childhood materials to teach students with severe disabilities in grades K-12 (Browder et al., 2004).

The developmental approach can be traced back to Jean Piaget. Piaget believed that all children went through cognitive developmental stages in a particular order, and no phase was skipped (Browder et al., 2004). Some children may move quickly through stages than other children, and some children may never get to some of the later stages (Brown et al., 1979). It is the idea that a student must have prerequisite skills before moving on to another task (Brown et al., 1979). In the academic context, an example would be the student has to learn how to identify their letters before being taught to read sight words. The developmental approach assumes that the educational needs of the students could best be met by focusing on the mental age of the student that was originated from a developmental, or norm-referenced, assessment (Browder et al., 2004).

Lou Brown and his colleagues (Brown, Branston, Hamere-Nietupski, Pumpian, Certo, & Gruenewald, 1979) rejected the developmental model and challenged the field to teach functional, age-appropriate skills that an individual without a disability would need on a daily basis to participate in the community or vocational setting (Brown et al., 1979). These functional skills can be as basic as communicating, eating, sitting at a desk, and washing hands independently (Brown et al., 1979; Jackson et al., 2008). Moreover, Brown et al. (1979) asserted that these functional skills should be taught in the natural environment instead of an artificial environment. For example, the student could be taught to eat lunch at a table with his same age peers. Lunch with his or her same age peers would be considered the natural environment since that is the environment that students without disabilities would eat lunch (not the self-contained classroom). Teaching the student to each lunch in their school community would prepare them for eating lunch in the community when the student exits school.

In the early 1990s, there was a shift from primarily teaching functional skills to social inclusion (Jackson et al., 2008). Social inclusion is physically placing the child in the regular education environment (Browder et al., 2004). The student is likely sitting in the back of the room. The approach is problematic, however, if there is not a plan for teaching the student the skills they need to participate in the school community (i.e., the classroom with his or her same-age peers; Jackson et al., 2008).

When No Child Left Behind (NCLB) became law in 2001, there was an increased emphasis on academic standards. The goal of NCLB was to hold states and districts accountable by implementing a results-oriented accountability system by showing statistical evidence of student achievement (Yell et al., 2006). NCLB required states to develop academic standards and then show statistical evidence of outcomes through statewide standardized assessment. All students, including students with severe disabilities, were required to participate in statewide assessments by NCLB and the IDEA (Yell, 2019). The IDEA also requires that states develop alternate assessments for students who cannot take the regular state assessments with or without modifications. Essentially this meant that alternate assessments are required for students with severe disabilities. These tests were required to be linked to the grade-level academic standards. The increased emphasis on academic instruction caused educators to stop focusing solely on functional skills (Lowrey et al., 2007).

Teachers began teaching students with severe disabilities the academic standards in a self-contained classroom (Browder et al., 2004). Browder, Wakeman, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, and Algozzine (2006) conducted a literature review of 128 studies on literacy for students with severe disabilities and found evidence that students with severe

disabilities can learn sight words, a finding confirmed by Browder and Xin (1998). The research indicated that almost all of the studies taught sight words in small sets (2-10 words), but only half of the studies addressed comprehension in any way. Thus, there is evidence that students with severe disabilities can learn these basic academic skills.

States have various policies regarding curriculum for students with severe disabilities. In South Carolina, the SCDE provided funding to districts to purchase instructional materials for teachers of students with severe disabilities, such as Attainment and Unique Learning Systems (J. Payne, personal communication, March 7, 2017 and May 11, 2017). These instructional materials were created to teach students with severe disabilities academic grade level standards. These materials provide the teachers with a way to teach English language arts, math, science and social studies to students with severe disabilities. Teaching students with severe disabilities academic skills in a separate location from their same age peers does not increase their quality of life.

Students with severe disabilities have the same basic human right as all other students to be taught alongside their peers in their school community. It is critical that the IEP team evaluates the skills necessary for the individual with severe disabilities. These students all have unique needs. The curricular assessment will guide the development of the skills that are crucial for the individual student.

Assessment for Students with Severe Disabilities

Assessment is crucial for developing the curriculum for students with severe disabilities. The IEP team must assess the future environment that the student will be living in to determine the skills that the student needs to be successful. The curriculum

must then be planned based on the assessment in order for the student to have the best quality of life.

Assessment in education refers to the methods that educators use to evaluate and measure skill acquisition and learning progress (Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Bolt, 2007). Assessment, which is the basis for determining each student's FAPE, is critical in planning for the student's educational program (Yell et al., 2016). The purposes of assessment under IDEA is a) initial identification and eligibility of special education services, b) development of the student's IEP and all parts of the student's programming, and c) instructional evaluation (Brown et al., 2016; Siegel-Causey & Allinder, 1998; Yell & Drasgow, 2007).

Criterion-referenced Assessments versus Norm-referenced Assessments

Table 2.1

Comparison between criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessments

	Criterion-referenced	Norm-referenced
Purpose	To determine whether the individual student has achieved the skill (Huitt, 1996; Lok et al., 2016)	To rank the achievement of students relative to the group (Huitt, 1996; Lok et al., 2016)
Design of assessment	Align with expected outcomes (Huitt, 1996; Lok et al., 2016)	Discriminates high and low performers (Huitt, 1996; Lok et al., 2016)
Content	Measures specific skills identified by teachers (Huitt, 1996)	Measures a broad skill areas (Huitt, 1996)
Score interpretation	Individual is compared to a predetermined standard of acceptable achievement (Huitt, 1996; Lok et al., 2016)	Individual is compared to others within the group (Huitt, 1996; Lok et al., 2016)

Two major categories of assessments are norm-referenced assessments and criterion-referenced assessments (Bond, 1996). In norm-referenced assessments, a predetermined number of students would earn a certain score (Bond, 1996). Norm-referenced assessments are meant to classify students (Bond, 1996). The norm-referenced assessment would tell the evaluator how the student is performing compared to the normative group (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2006; Salvia et al., 2007). Criterion-referenced assessments measure the performance of a student against a pre-determined set of criteria (Lok, McNaught, & Young, 2016). Criterion-referenced assessments let the evaluator know what the student can do and what the student knows instead of comparing the student to others (Bond, 1996). Table 2.1 compares the differences between criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessments.

It is important to determine the intent of the assessment when determining whether to use a norm-referenced assessment or a criterion-referenced assessment because these assessments are used for two very different purposes. Norm-referenced assessments are intended to rank students in order from high to low performers (Bond, 1996). Norm-referenced assessments are intended for comparing students who are performing academically at the same level. Criterion-referenced assessments are intended to measure the learning outcomes that are most important to the individual (Bond, 1996).

Norm-referenced test gives the educator information as to how he or she compares with their same age peers. Norm-referenced assessments provide little useful information for students with severe disabilities as they have such unique individualized needs (Browder et al., 2016). These assessments do not tell the educator about the

student's capabilities in comparison to the demands of his or her environment. Norm-referenced assessments typically used for determining eligibility for special education under IDEA.

Assessment for Eligibility

To qualify as a student with a disability eligible for special education services under the IDEA, the law requires an initial evaluation to determine the student's category of disability and if they need special education services (34 C.F.R. § 300.304(c)(4)). Similarly, South Carolina requires that an initial evaluation be conducted to determine eligibility and if the student requires services in special education (SCDE, 2011). There is a two-prong approach for determining eligibility for special education services. First, the evaluation must show evidence that the child qualifies as a child with a disability under one of the thirteen disability categories of IDEA and the second evidence must show that the student needs specialized instruction in order to be provided with a FAPE (IDEA Regulations, 34 C.F.R. § 300.306(a)). To determine that the child has a disability under IDEA, the student must be given an assessment to determine the student's intellectual functioning and a test to measure the student's adaptive behavior (SCDE, 2011).

Intellectual functioning is usually measured through norm-referenced assessments (Salvia et al., 2007). Norm-referenced assessments are interpreted by how the student performed compared to a particular group of students in the norm group (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2006; Salvia et al., 2007). Intelligence quotients (IQ) tests (i.e. Bayley Scales of Infant Development, Cattell Infant Intelligence Scales, McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities, Slosson Intelligence Test, Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, Wechsler

Intelligence Scale for Children, and Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence) are frequently used as the norm-referenced assessment to determine eligibility for special education (Snell & Brown, 2016). According to the SCDE (2017), students with severe disabilities must score at least 2½–3 standard deviations below the mean on both verbal and nonverbal scales of the IQ test. Students with severe disabilities often score at an infant level, which does not yield age appropriate skills (Snell & Brown, 2016).

Students with intellectual disabilities must also be assessed using an adaptive skills measure in their initial evaluation (SCDE, 2011). Adaptive skills refer to the student's daily living skills, social interactions, and interpersonal skills. Measures of adaptive behavior usually consist of checklists of skills that a student needs in order to function in his or her environment (Snell & Brown, 2016). Commonly used adaptive behavior measures include Adaptive Behavior Scale- School, Checklist of Adaptive Living Skills (CALS), Inventory for Client & Agency Planning (ICAP), Scales of Independent Behavior-Rev., and Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (Snell & Brown, 2016). Students with severe disabilities must score at least 2½–3 standard deviations below the mean in at least two adaptive skill domains (SCDE, 2017). Both the adaptive measure and the intellectual functioning assessment must be administered by a school psychologist. Assessments are needed to determine if the student qualifies as a student with a disability and to provide the IEP team information important in developing the student's program of special education and related services. Additionally, the team must assess the student's current and future environments to determine the desired outcomes for students.

Assessment for Curriculum Development for Students with Severe Disabilities

In order to determine the student's educational programming, the IEP team must determine the desired outcomes for the student's current and future environments (Browder et al., 2016). The IDEA requires that a student's FAPE should enable the student to make progress appropriate in light of the student's circumstances (*Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, 2017). The IDEA also requires that a student's program of special education meet his or her unique needs and prepare him or her for further education, employment, and independent living. The student's curriculum, therefore, must prepare the student for life after school. It is essential to determine what is important to the individual and his or her family to create a plan that will be meaningful to the student (Browder et al., 2016). By involving the individual and the family, there is an increased probability that the outcomes are socially valid or meaningful for the individual with the disability (Browder et al., 2016).

Person-centered planning.

A procedure for involving students and families is known as person-centered planning. Person-centered planning is drastically different than the traditional diagnostic, standardized assessment approach (Brown et al., 2016; Snell & Brown, 2000). It shifts the focus to the individual student and his or her needs to be successful in his or her environment (Brown et al., 2016). The broad principles of person-centered planning includes (a) involving the student, family members in the process, (b) focusing on the persons' abilities not their deficits, and (c) emphasizing the settings, supports and services available for the individual in the school or community (Browder, 2001).

Student preferences are essential in person-centered planning (Browder et al., 2016). Everyone has likes and dislikes, and it is essential to consider these preferences when planning for the student's instruction (Browder et al., 2016). Preference assessments can be conducted through indirect or direct methods. Indirect preference assessments include collecting information through checklists, interviews with families or friends, or observational notes (Browder et al., 2016). Direct preference assessments include systematically testing the individuals' preferences by providing the student with choices (Browder et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2016). Preference assessments are a way to ensure that they have a voice in their educational planning, and it can lead to increased self-determination and self-advocacy (Browder et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2016).

Ecological inventories and analyses.

Ecological inventories refer to a systematic approach for determining the skills that the individual needs in order to be successful in their future environment (Renzaglia et al., 2003). When educators use this approach, a traditional curriculum guide is not appropriate as a method to identify the student's instruction because it is not designed to meet the individual needs of the student. Rather, traditional curriculum guides follow the sequence of a textbook (Renzaglia et al, 2003). Instead, there must be careful assessment to determine the skills that the individual needs in his current and future environment (Renzaglia et al., 2003). An ecological analysis refers to a process for determining the skills that the individual needs to participate in those environments.

Ecological analyses are way of assessing the environment to determine the activities and skills necessary for the student to participate in his or her current and future environments (Browder et al., 2016; Renzaglia et al., 2003; Snell & Brown, 2000). When

conducting an ecological analysis, practitioners should systematically study the current environments in which the student will play, live, learn and work (Browder et al., 2001; Brown et al., 1979; Renzaglia et al., 2003). The practitioner should observe the natural environment to determine the skills that the individual needs to participate in that environment. For example, if the teacher is conducting an ecological analysis for Laura, a 15-year-old girl, the teacher may include Laura's house, her high school, and the store. The high school and her home are Laura's current environments, and the employment option of the store would be her future environment.

Each environment would then be divided into sub-environments. For example, the sub-environments in Laura's home would be the bathroom, kitchen, living room, and bedroom (Brown et al., 1979). Once the sub-environments are identified, the teacher inventories the environment to determine the skills the individual needs to be successful. Next, the teacher must assess the skills to determine the skills that the student can perform independently and the skills the student cannot complete. The teacher must prioritize the skills that need to be taught from most to least important (Renzaglia et al., 2003). Finally, the teacher must identify the supports the individual needs to be successful in the environment.

In the school community, the natural environment would be the regular education classroom. The teacher would observe in the regular education classroom to determine the skills that are expected of a typically developing student. The results from the ecological analysis in the regular education classroom would then be used by the teacher identify the skills the student needs to be successful in that environment. The information collected would aid the IEP team in determining the skills that they need to

target in the student's present levels of performance. Table 2.2 outlines an example of an ecological inventory.

Task analyses.

Task analysis measures focus on the student's performance on a sequence of behaviors during teaching or testing (Brown & Snell, 2016). Task analyses break the skill into teachable steps for the student. When developing a task analysis, teams should select a needed skill as determined by the ecological inventory that is important for the student in his or her environment (Snell & Brown, 2016). The team should then describe

Table 2.2

Ecological Inventory: Environment, Subenvironments, and Related Activities

Ecological Inventory		
Environment	Subenvironment	Activities
Regular Education Environment	Literacy	Listen to instructions, go to seat, sit in seat, open journal, write in journal, close journal
	Cafeteria	Stand in line, hold tray, pay for food, walk to seat, sit down, eat food, socialize with peers
	Computer lab	Sit in seat, turn on computer, use website, read information, complete assignment, turn off computer

the target behavior, the setting and the materials the individual needs to perform the behavior (Snell & Brown, 2016). The educator should observe the student's same age

peers and take note of the steps involved in the task (Snell & Brown, 2016). The task analysis would then be written on a data collection sheet and used for curriculum and assessment (Snell & Brown, 2016).

Assessment for Progress Monitoring

After the IEP team has developed the task analysis, the student's teacher must teach the skill. Additionally, the teacher must continuously assess the student to determine how the student is currently performing on the target behavior and to make adjustments to instruction as necessary. The task analysis should then be used to guide the student's curriculum. Knowledge of the student's learning is crucial to make the best decisions about the student's education. Snell and Brown (2016) recommend three guiding questions to help teams decide whether their data strategies are meaningful that include:

- Do these data measure behaviors or skills that are valued by the student, his or her parents, and the community or society?
- Do these data reflect the qualitative changes that we hope to see in this student?
- Are the types of changes or the amount of change in the student significant? (Snell & Brown, 2016, pg. 92)

If the answer is no to any of the questions, the team should reevaluate the purpose of the data that is being collected.

Current Teacher Behaviors

Despite the large amount of research on effective instruction for students with severe disabilities, they continue to leave school without the skills needed to be active members in their community. In order for students to exit with a better quality of life, teachers must prepare the students for post-secondary life throughout their K-12 schooling. The skills that are most meaningful to the student are determined through an

individualized curricular assessment. Kurth, Born, & Love (2016) investigated the educational experiences of high school students with severe disabilities. They found these students were placed in a self-contained classroom and effective instructional practices were not used. Students with severe disabilities were often homogenously grouped based on their academic level and had few opportunities to engage in a rigorous curriculum. In the self-contained classroom, students with severe disabilities are less likely to engage in meaningful instruction (Wehmeyer, Lattin, Lapp-Rincker, and Agran, 2003; Soukup, Wehmeyer, Bashinski, & Bovaird, 2007).

There is a significant amount of research that indicates person-centered planning approaches to determining curricula for students with severe disabilities is extremely effective. However, there have been no studies to date that have investigated how teachers use curricular assessments to develop IEPs for students with severe disabilities. In order to better understand how the schools are preparing students with severe disabilities for post-secondary success, conducting research to determine the assessments that teachers are using to assess these students and plan for their instruction is important.

Summary

Assessment for students with severe disabilities guides curriculum development. An analysis of the student's current and future environments must guide the development of the student's curriculum. Once the student's current and future environments are determined, the IEP team must determine the skills that the student needs to be an active participant in that environment. The teacher must determine the skills that the student can perform and the skills that must be taught. The objective data on how the student is

performing on the skill should then be used for the student's present levels of performance.

The IEP team should then determine annual goals for the student and set the criteria for mastery. The IEP team must then develop the special education and related services. Once IEP has been completed, the student's teacher implements the IEP to teach the student the skills needed for him or her to be successful in his or her current and future environments.

Study Justification

Students with severe disabilities continue to exit school without the skills necessary to enable them to live independently, have meaningful employment, or continue education. Students with severe disabilities are often taught the academic curriculum that is not differentiated to meet the student's individual needs in self-contained classrooms with little or no opportunity to participate in the school community (Kurth et al., 2016). The assessment of the students' unique needs should guide his or her curriculum development not a curriculum sequence. Students with severe disabilities should be taught the skills necessary to function in their community.

In South Carolina, the SCDE provided funding to districts to purchase instructional materials for teachers of students with severe disabilities such as Attainment and Unique Learning Systems (J. Payne, personal communication, March 7, 2017 and May 11, 2017). These materials were created to teach students with severe disabilities academic grade level standards. These materials provide the teachers with a way to teach English language arts, math, science and social studies to students with severe

disabilities. Teaching students with severe disabilities academic skills in a separate location from their same age peers does not increase their quality of life.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to a determine teachers' perspectives on a) the most valuable sources of information to determine the present levels of performance for students with severe disabilities and b) how they are utilizing assessment data to develop curriculum for students with severe disabilities.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of my study was to examine teachers' perspectives about how often, prepared, and important information is for determining present levels of academic and functional performance for students with severe disabilities. The study will address the following research questions:

1. What assessment methods are used most often by teachers to determine curricula for their students with severe disabilities?
2. What assessment methods are most important to teachers to determine curricula for their students with severe disabilities?
3. What information do teachers use to write PLAAFP statements for the IEPs of their students with severe disabilities?
4. What information is most important to teachers in developing PLAAFP statements for the IEPs of students with severe disabilities?
5. How do teachers who actively use ecological inventories and who do not actively use ecological inventories differ in characteristics?

Participants

The target population for this study is teachers of students with severe disabilities in South Carolina who had at least one student who took the State's alternate assessment. No more than one percent of the total population may be tested using alternate assessments (ESSA, 2017).

Recruitment Procedures

The survey used in this study was disseminated to all public school teachers of students with severe disabilities in grades K-12 in South Carolina through the South Carolina Alternate Assessment (SC-Alt)'s Test Information and Distribution Engine (TIDE). TIDE is the online alternate assessment system that is located on the SC-Alt portal (https://sc-alt.portal.airast.org/). If the teacher has at least one student taking the alternate assessment, the teacher is registered through this system.

After it was approved by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), I sent a mass email using the distribution list. I included a brief description of the survey along with the link to the survey. I resent the mass email two weeks after it was initially sent, and a week before the link closed.

Instrument

The survey was designed to investigate the teachers' perceptions of the most valuable sources of information utilized when developing and implementing present levels of academic achievement and functional performance for students with severe disabilities.

First Version of Instrument

I used EBSCO, Education Source, and ERIC databases to locate publications focused on curricular assessment for students with severe disabilities. I used an advanced keyword to search the terms "characteristics," and "severe disabilities" to locate articles that describe the characteristics of students with severe disabilities. I used an advanced keyword to search the terms "severe disabilities," "individualized education program," "present levels of academic achievement and functional performance," and "least

restrictive environment," to locate articles that describe the IEP process for students with severe disabilities. I used an advanced keyword to the search terms "severe disabilities," "person-centered planning," "ecological inventory," "functional skills," "task analysis," and "normalization" to locate articles that describe best practices for developing assessment for students with severe disabilities. I used an advanced keyword to search the terms "alternate assessment," "teacher perceptions," "academic skills" "norm-referenced assessment," "criterion-referenced assessment" and "severe disabilities" to locate information about current practices for students with severe disabilities. I also searched memorandum sent from the SCDE to develop items regarding current practices for students with severe disabilities.

Based on the review of the literature and the current practices, I developed a survey that is divided into five major sections. These sections are:

- Section 1: Participant Information
- Section 2: Curricular Assessments for Students with Severe Disabilities
- Section 3: Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process
- Section 4: School, District, or State-Supplied Mandatory Assessment Procedures or Materials
- Section 5: Demographics

In order to maintain a uniformed structure, I used a Likert-scale consisting of questions that address the frequency, preparedness, and importance to gauge the respondent's perception of the IEP consideration or assessment method.

Initially in Section 1, there were twelve Likert-scale questions about the characteristics of students with severe disabilities. In Section 2, there were thirteen

assessment methods listed. In Section 3, there were eight IEP considerations listed. In Section 4, there were seven characteristics about the state-purchased curricula. Section 5 consisted of fourteen demographics questions.

Expert Review

Five former special education teachers reviewed the instrument for clarity. These teachers are now in positions as special education coordinators or directors at the district level. Their qualifications are described in Table 3.1.

The content reviewers reviewed the study invitation, instructions, and the survey format. The content reviewers were asked the following questions:

1. Are the questions consistently understood?
2. Do respondents have the information needed to answer the questions?
3. Do the answers accurately describe what respondents have to say?
4. Have all assessments for this population been considered?
5. Do the answers provide valid measures of what the questions are designed to measure? (Fowler, 2014, pg. 103).

I collected their feedback through a Formstack © feedback form. Feedback included wording of my research questions and adding a demographic question. All feedback was discussed with my dissertation committee chair and revisions to the survey were make accordingly.

Section 1: Participant information.

Section 1 consisted of two questions. The purpose of this section was to qualify the respondents for inclusion in the survey. The first question required the participant to identify his or her position or title. The second question asked the teacher to identify his

or her role in serving students.

Table 3.1

Summary of Content Reviewers Expertise

Reviewer	Expertise
Reviewer 1	Three years special education teacher Three years school administrator Three years district administrator
Reviewer 2	Eleven years special education teacher Three years lead special education coach Eight years special education coordinator
Reviewer 3	Five years special education teachers Three years transition specialist Three years special education coach Two years special education coordinator
Reviewer 4	Six years special education teacher Ten years school administrator
Reviewer 5	Ten years special education teacher Fourteen years special education coordinator

Section 2: Curricular assessments for students with severe disabilities.

Section 2 consisted of questions related to the respondent's perception of the value of curricular assessments for students with severe disabilities. There are three overarching questions about curricular assessments for students with severe disabilities. To maintain a uniformed structure, this section uses the same format for the three overarching questions. The three questions were:

- How often do you use the following assessment method? (never, sometimes, often, always)
- How prepared are you to use the following assessment method? (not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
- How important is the following assessment method? (not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)

Table 3.2 consists of a summary of the thirteen assessment methods intended to be evaluated.

Section 3: Individualized education program (IEP) process.

Section 3 consisted of questions related to the respondent's perception of the IEP process. There were three overarching questions that the respondent was asked to answer about eight IEP considerations (see Table 3.3). The three questions were:

- How often do you consider the following information when determining present levels of academic achievement and functional performance for student IEPs? (never, sometimes, often, always)
- How prepared are you to use the following considerations when determining the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance on student IEPs? (not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
- How important is the following considerations when determining the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance on student IEPs? (not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)

Table 3.2

Summary of Development of Assessments Teachers Use to Develop Goals and Objectives for IEPs for Students with Severe Disabilities – Assessment Methods

Assessment Methods	Reference
Observation of the student in the general education classroom	Browder, Root, Wood, & Allison (2016)
An ecological inventory of the student's home	Snell, Brown, & McDonnell (2016)
A preference assessment	Browder, Root, Wood, & Allison (2016)
A task analysis of academic skills (e.g., teaching how to write letters)	Browder, Wakeman, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, and Algozzine (2006)
An ecological inventory of the student's local community	Snell, Brown, & McDonnell (2016)
A task analysis of functional skills (e.g., washing hands)	Brown, Branston, Hamre-Nietupski, Pumpian, Certo, & Gruenewald (1979)
An ecological inventory of the student's future environment	Snell, Brown, & McDonnell (2016)
A commercially-made assessment (e.g., Unique learning systems, Attainment)	Payne (2017)
Observation of the student in the special education classroom	Kurth, Born, & Love (2016)
An ecological inventory of the general education classroom	Snell, Brown, & McDonnell (2016)
Observation of the student in the community	Browder, Root, Wood, & Allison (2016)
Observation of the student in the home	Browder, Root, Wood, & Allison (2016)
Parental input	Browder, Root, Wood, & Allison (2016)

Table 3.3

Summary of Development of Assessment and Considerations Teachers Use to Develop Goals and Objectives for IEPs for Students with Severe Disabilities – Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process

IEP Consideration	Reference
The IEP is legally compliant.	Bateman & Linden (2012); Capizzi (2008); Christle & Yell (2010)
The IEP addresses functional skills.	Brown, Branston, Hamre-Nietupski, Pumpian, Certo, & Gruenewald (1979)
The IEP addresses South Carolina academic skills.	Browder, Wakeman, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, and Algozzine (2006)
The annual IEP goals address all of the students' needs identified in PLAAFP.	Christle & Yell (2010)
The students' services section of the IEP identifies all of the students' needs addressed in the PLAAFP.	Christle & Yell (2010)
The IEP is written at the student's developmental level.	Browder, Flowers, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Karvonen, Spooner, & Algozzine (2004)
The IEP is written based on the skill deficits identified in the student's psychological report.	South Carolina Department of Education (2011)
The IEP addresses the skills not met on the previous IEP.	South Carolina Department of Education (2011)

Section 4: School, district, or state-supplied mandatory assessment procedures or materials.

Section 4 consisted of three questions related to the respondent's perception of the value of commercially-made assessment purchased by the SCDE for students with severe

disabilities. There were three total questions in this section. In the first question, the respondent was asked to indicate the curriculum, if any, that is mandated by their district. In the next question, the respondent indicated their degree of satisfaction (very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, very satisfied) with the state-supplied materials for curriculum development. In the last question, the respondent indicated their opinion (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree) on how the assessment materials prepare students with severe disabilities for better post-secondary outcomes.

Section 5: Demographics.

The last section consisted of demographic information. There were specific questions about the teacher that include the teacher's age, gender, teaching certificate, number of years taught, and highest degree earned. This section also included questions that are specifically related to the teacher's school such as the approximate size of the school and the level (elementary, middle, high) that best describes the school. There were specific questions about the conditions in which they taught which include the grade levels they currently teach, number of students on their caseload, and number of paraprofessionals they were assigned to work with them. There were also specific questions about their training that included the number of courses they had taken related to teaching students with severe disabilities and the specific types of training they have received related to students with severe disabilities.

Survey Validity

In order to collect validity evidence, I used a two-part process (a) expert review and (b) content review to ensure a valid and comprehensive survey.

Reliability and Validity

Several steps were taken in the survey development, data collection, and data analysis to ensure that the survey is valid and reliable.

Pilot Testing

After experts in the field reviewed the instrument, the instrument was piloted with teachers of students with severe disabilities in another state (i.e., Hawaii). This state has a similar population of students who take the alternate assessment. A convenience sample was used and the results from the pilot testing were not used in final analysis. The purpose of the pilot study was to solicit feedback from individuals similar to the study's population.

The survey was distributed through an online instrument. The answers were directly recorded, which helps with eliminating data entry errors. Using a web-based system also allows participants to respond anonymously which encourages accurate and honest responses (Fowler, 2014).

The instrument was sent to ten special education teachers in Hawaii. Five teachers responded to the survey. After the results from the survey were collected, Cronbach's alpha was conducted to assess the internal reliability of the survey. Cronbach's alpha is a commonly used method for objectively measuring the internal consistency of items. Cronbach's alpha assesses the probability of the respondent responding the same way if given the survey multiple times (McClave & Sincich, 2009).

Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.0 to 1.0. The internal reliability is greater when the value is closer to 1.0. The Cronbach's alpha value when I piloted the survey with Hawaii was 0.933.

Table 3.4

Analysis Plan of Research Questions

Research Question	Analysis
1. What assessment methods are used most often by teachers to determine curriculum for their students with severe disabilities?	Descriptive statistics, mean, and percentages will be used to explore the survey data
2. What assessment methods are most important to teachers to determine curriculum for their students with severe disabilities?	Descriptive statistics, mean, and percentages will be used to explore the survey data
3. What information do teachers use to write PLAAFP statements for the IEPs of students with severe disabilities?	Descriptive statistics, mean, and percentages will be used to explore the survey data
4. What information is most important to teachers in developing PLAAFP statements for the IEPs of students with severe disabilities?	Descriptive statistics, mean, and percentages will be used to explore the survey data
5. How do teachers who actively use ecological inventories and who do not actively use ecological inventories differ in characteristics?	T-test

Data Analysis Procedures

The present study used an online survey to gather data. The individual survey responses generated to a CSV file for analysis. Then, I used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze the research questions. The specific analysis methods are listed in Table 3.4.

Questions 1-4 were answered by conducting item level analyses. I looked at the means of each survey question to answer the question. Question 5 was answered using a t-test. I looked at the difference between teachers who actively use ecological inventories and teachers who do not actively use ecological inventories. If the teacher answered only *never* or *rarely* to having used one of these four types of ecological inventories, they were classified as not actively using ecological inventories. If the teacher answered only *very often* or *always* to having used one of these four types of ecological inventories, they were classified as actively using ecological inventories.

Summary

Curricular assessments are vital for students with severe disabilities because when used appropriately assessment guides instruction. There is a significant amount of research that indicates best practices in curricular assessment for students with severe disabilities. This study will contribute to the literature because there are currently no studies that examine how teachers plan for curricular assessments for students with severe disabilities. By surveying all the teachers of students with severe disabilities in South Carolina, the SCDE will be able to determine what assessment methods are most important to the teachers and used most often by teachers.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to analyze teachers' perspectives on the most valuable sources of information for planning curriculum and developing IEPs for students with severe disabilities. My research questions are listed below.

1. What assessment methods are used most often by teachers to determine curricula for their students with severe disabilities?
2. What assessment methods are most important to teachers to determine curricula for their students with severe disabilities?
3. What information do teachers use to write PLAAFP statements for the IEPs of students with severe disabilities?
4. What information is most important to teachers in developing PLAAFP statements for the IEPs of students with severe disabilities?
5. How do teachers who actively use ecological inventories and who do not actively use ecological inventories differ in characteristics?

The survey, as shown in Appendix A, was distributed to teachers of students with severe disabilities in grades kindergarten through high school. The survey was sent to 1,311 people including Special Education Directors, Special Education Coordinators, District Test Coordinators, and Special Education Teachers. It must be noted there is no way of knowing if all of the individuals who received the survey are still teaching at the

time. A total of 486 respondents returned the survey. Twelve respondents did not respond to any questions required to answer the research questions or indicated that they did not currently teach students with severe disabilities. Therefore, they were removed from the study. This left 474 respondents in the sample.

Demographics

Table 4.1 shows the demographic and other characteristics of the teachers: gender, age, highest degree, certification, school type, and instructional setting. For information including the mean and median age, years taught, years taught with students with severe disabilities, number of students on caseload, type of school taught in, grades taught, and training provided see Tables B.1 and B.2 in Appendix B. Background characteristics of the sample include:

- 89.9% (426 out of 474) of the teachers are female while 9.1% (43 out of 474) are male
- 29% (139 out of 474) of the teachers had a Bachelor's Degree, 66% (314 out of 474) had a Master's degree, while 3% (13 out of 474) had a Doctoral Degree
- 93.5% (443 out of 474) worked with students in self-contained classrooms
- Only 25% (120 out of 474) of teachers had their degree in severe disabilities while 75% (354 out of 474) had their degree in something else (e.g., learning disabilities, behavior disorders)

Research Question One: What assessment methods are used most often by teachers to determine curriculum for their students with severe disabilities?

Table 4.1

Demographics of Respondents

Category	n	% (n=474)
Gender		
No response	5	1.1
Female	426	89.9
Male	43	9.1
Age		
No response	37	7.8
25–29 years	70	14.8
30–39 years	107	22.6
40-49 years	107	22.6
50 or more years	153	32.3
Highest Degree		
No response	8	1.7
Bachelor's	139	29.3
Master's	314	66.2
Doctorate	13	2.7
Certification		
Behavior Disorders	35	7.4
Deafness and Hearing Impairments	10	2.1
Emotional Disabilities	84	17.7
Generic Special Education	78	16.5
Learning Disabilities	134	28.3
Multi-Categorical	197	41.6
Orthopedically Impaired	15	3.2
Severe Disabilities	120	25.3
Visual Impairments	11	2.3
Mental (Intellectual) Disabilities	232	48.9
Other	85	17.9
School Type		
Elementary	203	42.8
Middle	115	24.3
High	141	29.7
Special (School for students with severe disabilities)	30	6.3
Virtual	2	0.4
Other	12	2.5
Instructional Setting		
No response	17	3.6
Inclusion in regular education classroom	3	0.6
Pull-out resource classroom	11	2.3
Self-contained classroom	443	93.5

The first question posed in the survey was "How OFTEN do you consider the following information when determining present levels of performance for student IEPs?" Respondents could reply with *never* (1), *rarely* (2), *very often* (3), and *always* (4). The means to the responses were calculated to gauge the frequency of use across respondents. Table 4.2 shows the rank ordering of the method means from greatest to least. For additional information such as response distributions for frequency of use and the summary of statistics for frequency of use see Tables B.3 and B.4 in Appendix B.

Table 4.2

Rank Ordering for Assessment Method Frequency of Use

Survey Item	Group Mean (M)
9. Observation of the student in the special education classroom	3.8
13. Parental input	3.4
6. A task analysis of functional skills (e.g., washing hands)	3.2
4. A task analysis of academic skills (e.g., teaching how to write letters)	3.1
8. A commercially-made assessment (e.g., Unique learning systems, Attainment)	3.1
3. A preference assessment	2.8
7. An ecological inventory of the student's future environment	2.2
1. Observation in the general education classroom	2.1
5. An ecological inventory of the student's local community	2.0
10. An ecological inventory of the general education classroom	2.0
11. Observation of the student in the community	2.0
2. An ecological inventory of the student's home	1.7
12. Observation of the student in the home	1.3

Observation of the student in the special education classroom ranked the highest with a mean of 3.8, which means, this assessment method is the most frequently used amongst teachers of students with severe disabilities. Parental input ranked the second highest with a mean of 3.4. Observation of the student in the home ranked the lowest with a mean of 1.3.

Research Question Two: What assessment methods are most important to teachers to determine curriculum for their students with severe disabilities?

The second question posed in the survey was "How IMPORTANT is the following assessment method?" Respondents could reply with *not at all* (1), *slightly* (2), *moderately* (3), and *extremely* (4). The means were calculated to gauge the importance across respondents. Table 4.3 shows the rank ordering of the method means from greatest to least. For information about the response distributions for importance and the summary of statistics for importance see Tables B.5 and B.6 in Appendix B. Observation of the student in the special education classroom was ranked the most important. The mean for this method was 3.8, which means, teachers with severe disabilities view this assessment method as most important for students with severe disabilities. Parental input ranked the second highest with a mean of 3.7. Observation of the student in the home ranked the lowest with a mean of 2.6.

Research Question Three: What information do teachers use to write PLAAFP statements for the IEPs of students with severe disabilities?

The third question posed in the survey was "How OFTEN do you consider the following information when determining present levels of performance for student IEPs?" Respondents could reply with *never* (1), *rarely* (2), *very often* (3), and *always* (4).

The means to the responses were calculated to gauge the frequency of use across respondents. Table 4.4 shows the rank ordering of the IEP information type means from greatest to least. For the response distributions for frequency of use and the summary of statistics for frequency of use see Tables B.7 and B.8 in Appendix B. "The IEP is legally compliant" and "The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education" ranked the most frequently used

Table 4.3

Rank Ordering of Assessment Methods' Importance

Survey Item	Group Mean (M)
9. Observation of the student in the special education classroom	3.8
13. Parental input	3.7
6. A task analysis of functional skills (e.g., washing hands)	3.6
4. A task analysis of academic skills (e.g., teaching how to write letters)	3.4
3. A preference assessment	3.3
7. An ecological inventory of the student's future environment	3.1
8. A commercially-made assessment (e.g., Unique learning systems, Attainment)	3.1
11. Observation of the student in the community	2.9
1. Observation in the general education classroom	2.8
2. An ecological inventory of the student's home	2.7
5. An ecological inventory of the student's local community	2.7
10. An ecological inventory of the general education classroom	2.6
12. Observation of the student in the home	2.6

with means of 3.9. "The IEP is written based on the skill deficits identified in the student's psychological report" was ranked the least frequently used with a mean of 3.1.

Research Question Four: What information is most important to teachers in developing PLAAFP statements for the IEPs of students with severe disabilities?

The fourth question posed in the survey was "How IMPORTANT is the following

Table 4.4

Rank Ordering of IEP Considerations' Frequency of Use

Survey Item	Group Mean (M)
1. The IEP is legally compliant.	3.9
4. The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education.	3.9
2. The IEP addresses functional skills.	3.8
5. The annual IEP goals address all of the students' needs identified in PLAAFP.	3.8
6. The students' services section of the IEP identifies all of the students' needs addressed in the PLAAFP.	3.8
7. The IEP is written at the student's developmental level.	3.8
3. The IEP reflects the South Carolina academic standards.	3.2
9. The IEP addresses the skills not met on the previous IEP.	3.2
8. The IEP is written based on the skill deficits identified in the student's psychological report.	3.1

assessment method?" Respondents could reply with *not at all* (1), *slightly* (2), *moderately* (3), and *extremely* (4). The means to the responses were calculated to gauge the importance across respondents. Table 4.5 shows the rank ordering of the method

means from greatest to least. For information about the response distributions for importance and the summary of statistics for importance see Tables B.9 and B.10 in Appendix B. "The IEP is legally compliant" and "The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education" were ranked the most important with means of 3.9. "The IEP is written based on the skill deficits identified in the student's psychological report" was ranked the least important with a mean of 3.1.

Research Question Five: How do teachers who actively use ecological inventories and who do not actively use ecological inventories differ in characteristics?

After looking at the data, I found that 43.5% of the teachers (206 out of 474) rated that they *never* or *rarely* used ecological inventories, while a total of 56.5% of teachers (268 out of 474) rated that they used ecological inventories either *very often* or *always*. Since approximately half of the teachers used ecological inventories and the other half did not, I wanted to see if the differences in the characteristics of the teachers that used them and those that did not use them (e.g., I wanted to know if they had more training or if they felt more prepared to use them).

The sample was divided into to two groups: (1) teachers who actively used ecological inventories (EI) and (2) teachers who did not actively use ecological inventories (Not EI). Group type was determined based on responses to frequency of use for the four types of ecological inventories included in the survey: ecological inventory of the student's home, local community, future environment, and general education classroom. If the teacher answered only *never* or *rarely* to having used one of these four types of ecological inventories, they were classified as not actively using ecological

inventories. If the teacher answered only *very often* or *always* to having used one of these four types of ecological inventories, they were classified as actively using ecological inventories.

After dividing the teachers into two groups, I first looked at the demographics to

Table 4.5

Rank Ordering of IEP Considerations' Importance

Survey Item	Group Mean (M)
1. The IEP is legally compliant.	3.9
4. The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education.	3.9
2. The IEP addresses functional skills.	3.8
5. The annual IEP goals address all of the students' needs identified in PLAAFP.	3.8
6. The students' services section of the IEP identifies all of the students' needs addressed in the PLAAFP.	3.8
7. The IEP is written at the student's developmental level.	3.8
3. The IEP reflects the South Carolina academic standards.	3.2
9. The IEP addresses the skills not met on the previous IEP.	3.2
8. The IEP is written based on the skills deficits identified in the student's psychological report.	3.1

see if there were any differences in the two groups. Overall, teachers that actively use ecological inventories have had more training than teachers who do not use ecological inventories (see Table 4.6). Also, more teachers actively use ecological inventories in grades 9-12.

Next, the group means on survey items regarding assessment methods and IEP process were examined. The frequency of use and importance aspects of these survey items were discussed in Research Questions 1-4. The means for importance of assessment methods and IEP processes of the survey are presented based on group type in the discussion below.

Table 4.6

Demographics of EI vs EI Not Used Actively

	EI Used Actively		EI Not Used Actively	
Category	n	%	n	%
Grades Taught				
P	12	4.5	8	3.9
K-2	67	25.0	68	33.0
3-5	99	36.9	95	46.1
6-8	86	32.1	71	34.5
9-12	113	42.2	54	26.2
Type of Training				
Workshops	194	73.5	126	61.2
Online courses	128	48.5	88	42.7
Conferences	177	67.0	122	59.2
University or college teaching	214	81.1	151	73.3
Other	25	9.5	15	7.3

Note. n = 268 for EI Used Actively, n = 206 for EI Not Used Actively

Table 4.7 show how the number of observations, means, and standard deviation for each of the groups. The last column shows the mean of the *Not EI* group from the mean of the *EI* group. The differences for the five ecological inventory items were marked with a *. These differences were expected to be large on the basis of how the teachers were divided into the two groups. All other items that had a mean difference of at least 0.5 in magnitude were marked with ** and bolded in the tables. Eleven such items were marked. All of these differences were found to be statistically significant via independent sample t-tests at the $\alpha = .05/12 = .004$ level. The Bonferroni adjustment to the

α Type I error was applied to control for the familywise Type I error. The p-value for each of the 11 differences tested was less than .001. Nine of the t-tests assumed equal variances, while two assumed unequal variances. The t-tests with unequal variances assumed appear with non-integer degrees of freedom. Table B.14 in Appendix B has the summary of the t-Test results.

Table 4.7 shows the summary statistics for how important teachers believe the assessment methods is by groups teachers who use ecological inventories and teachers who do not use ecological inventories. Teachers who use ecological inventories believed that observations in the general education classroom, an ecological inventory (of the student's home, student's local community, student's future environment, and the general education classroom) were more important than teachers who did not use ecological inventories. There was very little difference between the teacher's perspectives of those who actively used ecological inventories and those who did not use ecological inventories for task analyses of academic skills or commercially-made assessments.

Table 4.8 shows the summary statistics for how important teachers believed different IEP processes are by teachers that used ecological inventories compared to teachers that do not use ecological inventories. It is noted that there is no difference between the teachers' perspectives on "The IEP is written at the student's developmental level" and "The IEP is written based on the skills deficits identified in the student's psychological report."

Table 4.7

Summary Statistics for Assessment Methods' Importance

Survey Items	EI			Not EI			*EI* Mean Minus *Not EI* Mean
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	
1. Observation in the general education classroom	264	3.0	1.0	203	2.5	1.1	**0.5****
2. An ecological inventory of the student's home	263	3.0	0.9	203	2.4	0.9	**0.6****
3. A preference assessment	264	3.4	0.7	205	3.1	0.8	0.3
4. A task analysis of academic skills (e.g., teaching how to write letters)	264	3.5	0.7	205	3.3	0.8	0.2
5. An ecological inventory of the student's local community	261	3.0	0.8	204	2.4	0.8	**0.6****
6. A task analysis of functional skills (e.g., washing hands)	266	3.7	0.6	202	3.5	0.8	0.3
7. An ecological inventory of the student's future environment	266	3.4	0.7	202	2.6	0.9	**0.8****
8. A commercially-made assessment (e.g., Unique learning systems, Attainment)	266	3.2	0.8	203	3.1	0.8	0.1
9. Observation of the student in the special education classroom	263	3.8	0.5	206	3.8	0.4	0.0
10. An ecological inventory of the general education classroom	264	2.9	1.0	205	2.3	0.9	**0.6****
11. Observation of the student in the community	265	3.1	0.9	202	2.7	0.9	0.4
12. Observation of the student in the home	267	2.7	1.0	203	2.4	0.9	0.3
13. Parental input	268	3.8	0.5	206	3.7	0.5	0.1

Table 4.8

Summary Statistics for IEP Process' Importance

Survey Items	EI N	EI Mean	EI SD	Not EI N	Not EI Mean	Not EI SD	*EI* Mean Minus *Not EI* Mean
1. The IEP is legally compliant.	267	4.0	0.2	204	3.9	0.4	0.1
2. The IEP addresses functional skills.	266	3.9	0.4	205	3.8	0.5	0.1
3. The IEP reflects the South Carolina academic standards.	265	3.2	0.9	206	2.8	1.0	0.3
4. The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education.	262	3.9	0.3	205	3.9	0.3	0.0
5. The annual IEP goals address all of the students' needs identified in PLAAFP.	268	3.8	0.4	205	3.8	0.5	0.0
6. The students' services section of the IEP identifies all of the students' needs addressed in the PLAAFP.	264	3.8	0.4	203	3.8	0.5	0.0
7. The IEP is written at the student's developmental level.	263	3.8	0.5	205	3.8	0.5	0.0
8. The IEP is written based on the skills deficits identified in the student's psychological report.	267	3.4	0.8	203	3.2	0.8	0.2
9. The IEP addresses the skills not met on the previous IEP.	267	3.5	0.7	205	3.4	0.7	0.1

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the current state of curricular assessments for students with severe disabilities in the state of South Carolina. To evaluate the curricular assessments used for students with severe disabilities, I surveyed 474 teachers of students with severe disabilities in the state of South Carolina. The survey was divided into five sections; Section 1: Participant Information, Section 2: Curricular Assessments for Students with Severe Disabilities, Section 3: Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process, Section 4: School, District, or State-Supplied Mandatory Assessment Procedures or Materials, and Section 5: Demographics. My discussion is organized by research questions and includes implications for practice and future research.

Demographics

A total of 474 teachers of students with severe disabilities responded to the survey. Of the 474 teachers who responded, 93.5% (443 out of 474) worked with students in self-contained classrooms. Only 25% (120 out of 474) of teachers had their degree in severe disabilities while 75% (354 out of 474) had their degree in something else (e.g., learning disabilities, behavior disorders).

The findings support previous research in several ways. There is extensive research indicating that students with severe disabilities are taught primarily in a self-contained classroom (Kleinert et al., 2015). In fact, Kleinert et al. (2015) surveyed

teachers of students with severe disabilities in fifteen states and found that 93% of the students were primarily served in self-contained classrooms, separate schools, or home settings. My study found that 93.5% of students with severe disabilities were primarily served in a self-contained setting. This finding is consistent with previous research.

This study contributes to our knowledge base in several ways. There are no other studies that I could locate that investigate the certifications of teachers of students with severe disabilities. My study found that only 25% (120 out of 474) of teachers with severe disabilities had their degree in severe disabilities. This finding is concerning as preservice programs are where teachers are taught effective methodology and curriculum development specific to the population of students. Effective instructional strategies for students with severe disabilities vary from other students with disabilities. If preservice programs are going to begin offering generalist special education degrees, they need to teach all preservice teachers how to develop appropriate curriculum for students with severe disabilities.

Research Question One: What assessment methods are used most often by teachers to determine curriculum for their students with severe disabilities?

Respondents were asked how often they used thirteen different assessment methods, and they could reply with *never* (1), *rarely* (2), *very often* (3), and *always* (4). I found that observation in the special education classroom was the most frequently used assessment method by teachers of students with severe disabilities with an average mean of 3.8 out of 4. Ecological inventories of the home, general education classroom, student's future environment, and local community were ranked the least used with the highest mean averaging 2.2 out of 4.

The findings support previous research in several ways. There is extensive research indicating that students with severe disabilities are placed in a self-contained classroom in which effective instructional practices are not used (Kleinert et al., 2015; Kurth et al., 2016). They are often homogenously grouped based on their academic level and have few opportunities to engage in a rigorous curriculum (Kurth et al., 2016). Teachers often rely on outside factors (e.g., curriculum packages) to determine curriculum for students with severe disabilities instead of best practices (Lawson & Jones, 2018). Like the previous studies, I found that the majority of students with severe disabilities are served in a special education classroom. Similarly, I found that teachers of students with severe disabilities most often assess students in the special education classroom. It is not surprising that teachers assess students in the special education classroom given that the students are primarily instructed in the special education classroom.

I have not been able to locate any studies that addressed teachers' perceptions on assessment for students with severe disabilities. There were several new findings from my study. First, I found teachers of students with severe disabilities use observation of the student in the special education classroom most frequently to assess students with severe disabilities. Several studies have found that students with severe disabilities are primarily instructed in the self-contained classroom (Kleinert et al., 2015; Kurth et al., 2016). However, we could not locate any other studies that have been conducted to inform the field that students with severe disabilities are primarily assessed in the special education classroom as well.

Assessment guides curriculum development for students with severe disabilities (Snell & Brown, 2016). Assessment in a segregated setting away from his or her same-age peers would lead to the development of curriculum in a self-contained setting. Curriculum for students with severe disabilities that takes place in a segregated setting away from his or her same age peers is not appropriate for students with severe disabilities (Kurth et al., 2016). Segregation does not prepare the student for life in the community with his or her same-age peers because students will severe disabilities will not be separated from their peers in the community.

Second, ecological inventories of the home, general education classroom, student's future environment, and local community were ranked as some of the least used by teachers of students with severe disabilities. There is extensive research indicating that ecological analyses are most effective way for special education teachers to identify the necessary skills that students with severe disabilities need to be successful in the school and community (Snell & Brown, 2016). However, we could not locate any studies that investigated if teachers of students with severe disabilities are using ecological inventories. My study provides evidence that ecological analyses are not being used to assess the necessary skills students with severe disabilities need to participate in their community or to plan for instruction.

Research Question Two: What assessment methods are most important to teachers to determine curriculum for their students with severe disabilities?

Respondents were asked how important thirteen different assessment methods were to them for determining curriculum for students with severe disabilities, and they could reply with *not at all* (1), *slightly* (2), *moderately* (3), and *extremely* (4). I found

that teachers of students with severe disabilities also indicated that observation of the student in the special education classroom was the most important assessment method also with an average mean of 3.8 of 4. Ecological inventories of the student's home, local community, and general education classroom ranked as the least important to teachers with the highest mean averaging 2.7 of 4.

The findings support previous research in several ways. Students with severe disabilities are primarily instructed in a self-contained classroom (Kleinert et al., 2015; Kurth et al., 2016). They are often homogenously grouped based on their academic level and had few opportunities to engage in a rigorous curriculum (Kurth et al., 2016). The SCDE provided districts with commercially-made instructional materials (i.e., Attainment and Unique learning systems) in order for students with severe disabilities to be taught academic skills in the self-contained classroom (J. Payne, personal communication, March 7, 2017). Teachers often rely on these outside factors (e.g., curriculum packages) to determine curriculum for students with severe disabilities instead of best practices (Lawson & Jones, 2018). Similar to the previous studies in which the researchers found teachers of students with severe disabilities primarily instruct students in the self-contained classroom (Kurth et al., 2016; Lawson & Jones, 2018), I found teachers of students with severe disabilities find assessment in the special education classroom most important.

This study contributes to our knowledge base in several ways. First, there have been no other studies conducted that investigate the teachers' perspectives on the most important assessment methods for students with severe disabilities. My study found evidence that teachers of students with severe disabilities find observation of the student

in the special education classroom the most important method to use when assessing students with severe disabilities for determining the student's curriculum. There are requirements that state that the PLAAFP statements must be based on objective data (Bateman & Linden, 2012). However, according to my findings, teachers of students with severe disabilities find subjective teacher observation in the special education classroom to be most important. One potential explanation for this is observation in the special education classroom may be the most convenient method of assessing students with severe disabilities.

Research Question Three: What information do teachers use to write PLAAFP statements for the IEPs of students with severe disabilities?

Respondents were asked to rank how often they relied on nine statements when writing IEPs for students with severe disabilities. They could reply with *never* (1), *rarely* (2), *very often* (3), and *always* (4). "The IEP is legally compliant" and "The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education" ranked the most frequently used with means of 3.9. Although these two statements ranked the highest, "The IEP is written at the student's developmental level" had a mean of 3.8. "The IEP is written based on skills based on the skills deficits identified in the psychological report" a mean of 3.1 indicating that the majority of teachers relied on the information in psychological reports *very often* or *always*.

The findings support previous research in several ways. When developing initial student IEPs, IEP teams often focus assessment for identification of special education and fail to conduct assessments that would lead to meaningful curriculum development (Yell

et al., 2016). Many times, IEP teams conduct assessments that do not result in meaningful benefits to the student's education (Yell et al., 2016). For students with severe disabilities, psychological evaluations are to be used solely for the identification of a disability, not planning the student's curriculum (Snell & Brown, 2016). Like the previous studies, I found that teachers of students with severe disabilities rely on assessments (i.e., psychological evaluations, norm-referenced assessments) that do not produce meaningful educational information on their student.

In 1975, when schools were first mandated to educate students with disabilities alongside their same-age peers, teachers often did not know what to teach students with severe disabilities because these students were frequently not educated in public schools (Browder et al., 2004). Many educators, therefore adopted the developmental approach, which involved adapting infant and early childhood materials to teach students with severe disabilities in grades K-12 (Browder et al., 2004). I found that teachers of students with severe disabilities are still using the developmental approach to write PLAAFP statements for students with severe disabilities.

This study contributed to the knowledge base in several ways. First, teachers of students with severe disabilities indicated they often utilize the student's psychological evaluation and the student's developmental level for determining the student's PLAAFP. This finding is novel because since the EAHCA was enacted in 1975, there have been several paradigm shifts in curriculum for students with severe disabilities (Browder et al., 2016). The initial approach to teaching students with severe disabilities was the developmental approach. Since then, there has been a shift to teaching functional skills, teaching academics to students with severe disabilities, social inclusion, and teaching

students with severe disabilities academics in the general education classroom. As research evolves, we are able to better understand how to prepare students with severe disabilities to be contributing members of society. Based on this study, many teachers have not moved past relying on the student's developmental level to write student PLAAFPs.

Research Question Four: What information is most important to teachers in developing PLAAFP statements for the IEPs of students with severe disabilities?

Respondents were asked to rank how important nine statements were to them when writing IEPs for students with severe disabilities, and they could reply with *not at all* (1), *slightly* (2), *moderately* (3), and *extremely* (4). "The IEP is legally compliant" and "The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education" were ranked the most important with means of 3.9. Although these two statements ranked the highest, "The IEP is written at the student's developmental level" had a mean of 3.8. "The IEP is written based on skills based on the skills deficits identified in the psychological report" a mean of 3.1 indicating that the majority of teachers rated them as *moderately* or *extremely* important.

These findings support previous research in several ways. The IEP is a legal document developed by an IEP team that drives all of the student's educational decisions (Bateman & Linden, 2012; Capizzi, 2008; Christle & Yell, 2010; Yell, 2019; Yesseldyke & Algozzine, 2006). The IEP is the blueprint of the student with a disability's FAPE (Yell, 2019). It is critical for IEP teams take steps to ensure student IEPs are legally compliant (Yell et al., 2016). My research builds on previous legal research (Yell, 2019; Yell et al., 2016) because I found that teachers of students with severe disabilities find

that the IEP being legally compliant the most important statement addressed in the IEP component of my survey.

This study contributed to our knowledge base in several ways. First, teachers of students with severe disabilities indicated that they find the student's developmental level important when writing student PLAAFPs. This finding is novel because the law requires access to grade level instruction for students with severe disabilities. It is concerning that teachers are still utilizing the developmental approach for PLAAFP statements when the research has evolved significantly in the past fifty years. We have evidence the developmental approach is not an effective instructional practice for students with severe disabilities.

Research Question Five: How do teachers who actively use ecological inventories and who do not actively use ecological inventories differ in characteristics?

My final research questioned examined the differences between teachers who actively used ecological inventories and teachers who did not actively use ecological inventories to determine if there were any differences between the two groups of teachers. If the teacher answered only *never* or *rarely* to having used one of the four types of ecological inventories, they were classified as not actively using ecological inventories. If the teacher answered only *very often* or *always* to having used one of the four types of ecological inventories, they were classified as actively using ecological inventories. I found that teachers who actively use ecological inventories have had more training overall. I also found in high school more teachers utilize ecological inventories (113 out of 268 or 42.2%) than teachers that do not utilize ecological inventories (54 out of 206 or 26.2%). In grades 3-5, there is little difference between number of teachers that

utilize ecological inventories (99 out of 268 or 36.9%) and the number of teachers that do not utilize ecological inventories (95 out of 206 or 46.1%).

This study found there is very little difference between the teachers' perspectives of those that actively use ecological inventories and those that do not use ecological inventories for task analyses of academic skills or commercially-made assessments. Teachers that actively use ecological inventories ranked the importance of task analyses of academic skills as 3.5 out of 4 while teachers that do not actively use ecological inventories ranked the importance of the task analyses of academic skills as 3.3 out of 4. Teachers that actively use ecological inventories ranked the importance of commercially-made assessments as 3.2 out of 4 while teachers that do not actively use ecological inventories ranked the importance of the commercially-made assessments as 3.1 out of 4. These differences are not significant considering how different ecological inventories are from commercially-made assessments and task analyses of academic skills.

Transition is crucial for planning for the student's transition from school to adulthood. IDEA requires the postsecondary goals in employment, education and independent living (if appropriate) to facilitate transition to adulthood. Transition assessments are required by law to plan for the student's post-secondary goals in the area of independent living (if appropriate), employment, and education (Mazzotti & Test, 2016). My research found that more high school teachers use ecological inventories than those that do not use ecological inventories. Since the law for transition requires teachers to focus employment, independent living, and education, it does not surprise me that there is a greater number of high school teachers that indicate they use ecological inventories than the teachers that do not use them.

There have been no studies that investigate the differences between teachers that use ecological inventories and teachers that do not use ecological inventories. My study contributes to the body of knowledge by finding there is very little difference between the teacher perspectives of those that actively use ecological inventories and those that do not use ecological inventories for task analyses of academic skills or commercially-made assessments. Ecological inventories and analyses refer to a systematic approach for determining the skills that the individual needs in order to be successful in their future environment (Renzaglia et al., 2003). Commercially-made assessments are not designed with an individual student in mind. Ecological analyses and commercially-made assessments represent two different types of assessments for students with severe disabilities. Ecological analyses assess the skills the student needs to be successful in the general education environment or the community while commercially-made assessments assess the academic skills that they have been taught. These two assessments represent different philosophies for teaching and assessing students with severe disabilities. Therefore, teachers that rank ecological inventories important should not also rank using commercially-made assessments high. This finding suggests that teachers who indicate they use ecological inventories may not in fact use them or actually understand how to use them. Another explanation is the commercially-made assessments may be more convenient than ecological inventories. Another potential explanation is that teachers do not know the difference between the commercially-made assessments and ecological inventories.

Limitations of Study and Implications for Future Studies

There are a few limitations with my study. The survey was sent out from me as an employee of the SCDE. The SCDE purchased all teachers of students with severe disabilities commercially-made instructional materials (e.g., Attainment and Unique Learning Systems). Some districts in South Carolina require teachers of students with severe to use these materials. The responses of the teachers may have been influenced by these materials that the SCDE purchased for the teachers.

There are several areas that need to be investigated further. Researchers may want to investigate preservice programs for teachers of students with severe disabilities. It would be interesting to find out how many generalist special education preservice programs actually offer courses on effective practices in teaching students with severe disabilities. It would also be interesting to learn how many of the 120 teachers who indicated they have a degree in severe disabilities rated that they often use ecological inventories. Are they using the research-based practices for students with severe disabilities or using a method that may be more convenient?

It would also be interesting to provide open-ended questions to find out why the teachers find the student's developmental level important for developing the PLAAFP. It would also be interesting to have teachers of students with severe disabilities elaborate on ecological inventories to investigate if they understand how to use them. It would also be interesting to investigate why teachers of students with severe disabilities use observation in the classroom as the most frequent assessment method. Is it convenience?

Researchers may also want to further analyze actual student IEPs. There is no way to know if the teachers are actually writing legally compliant IEPs. Further research

may want to analyze actual IEPs to determine if the IEPs for students with severe disabilities are actually legally compliant. It would be interesting to determine the most common errors in IEPs for students with severe disabilities. If IEP teams understood the most common errors, districts could provide training to the teachers to prevent these errors.

Summary

In summary, the results of this study have relevance for practitioners and researchers of students with severe disabilities. Teachers' use of observation of the student in the special education classroom is the most frequently used and teachers find it most important. Teachers also use the student's psychological evaluation and developmental level when determining the PLAAFP statements for students with severe disabilities. There is very little difference between the teachers' perspectives of those that actively use ecological inventories and those that do not use ecological inventories for task analyses of academic skills or commercially-made assessments. This finding suggests that teachers who actively use ecological inventories may not know what they are and thus may not understand how to properly use them. This study adds to the literature on curricular assessments for students with severe disabilities because this is the first study that has examined the teachers' perspectives on assessing students with severe disabilities.

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APPENDIX A

ASSESSMENTS AND CONSIDERATIONS TEACHERS USE TO DEVELOP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE IEPS OF STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES

The primary purpose of this survey is to examine the assessments and considerations you use when developing goals and objectives for the Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) of students with severe disabilities. Your participation in this study will help the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) determine the most valuable considerations and assessment methods that teachers of students with severe disabilities use when developing goals and objectives for the IEPs.

Students with severe disabilities have significant delays in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Intellectual functioning refers to the individual's general mental capacity and involves the individual's ability to learn, reason, problem solve and comprehend. Adaptive behavior refers to the skills the individual needs to function in his or her daily life and involves skills such as social skills, personal independence, and coping skills.

In this survey, you will be asked to share how often, how prepared, and how important different considerations and assessment methods are for developing goals and objectives for the IEPs. The survey consists of five parts: participant information,

assessment methods, IEP considerations, district and school mandated materials, and demographic information.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. If for some reason you prefer not to participate, please do not fill out the survey. We would like to assure you that there are no risks associated with your participation in the study. Your responses to the survey questions are completely confidential and will be released only as summaries in which individual answers cannot be identified.

The survey will take about 15 minutes to complete. If you have any questions or comments about the study, I will be happy to address them by e-mail or by the phone number listed below.

Thanks for your time and contribution!

Sincerely,

Jill Christmus

mchristmus@ed.sc.gov

(803) 734-8048

Section 1: Participant Information

1. What is your current job title?
   Special Educator
   School level administrator
   District level administrator
   Other (specify): _____

2. Indicate your primary responsibility (check all that apply).
   Teacher of students with severe disabilities
   Administer the alternate assessments to students with severe disabilities
   Other (specify): _____

Section 2: Curricular Assessments for Students with Severe Disabilities

This section consists of questions about how often, prepared, and how often you use the following assessment methods for students with severe disabilities. Please complete all three questions beside each box by answering the following questions:

How OFTEN do you use the following assessment method?
How PREPARED are you to use the following assessment method?
How IMPORTANT is the following assessment method?

	How OFTEN do you use the following assessment method?	How PREPARED are you to use the following assessment method?	How IMPORTANT is the following assessment method?
Observation in the general education classroom	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
An ecological inventory of the student's home	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)

A preference assessment	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
A task analysis of academic skills (e.g., teaching how to write letters)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
An ecological inventory of the student's local community	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
A task analysis of functional skills (e.g., washing hands)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
An ecological inventory of the student's future environment	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
A commercially-made assessment (e.g., Unique learning systems, Attainment)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
Observation of the student in the special education classroom	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)

An ecological inventory of the general education classroom	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
Observation of the student in the community	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
Observation of the student in the home	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
Parental input	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)

Section 3: Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process

This section consists of questions about how often, prepared, and important the following considerations are when developing IEPs for students with severe disabilities.

- How OFTEN do you consider the following information when determining present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) for students′ IEPs?
- How PREPARED are you to use the following considerations when determining present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) for students′ IEPs?
- How IMPORTANT are the following considerations when determining present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) for students′ IEPs?

	How OFTEN do you consider the following information when determining present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) for students′ IEPs?	How PREPARED are you to use the following considerations when determining present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) for students′ IEPs?	How IMPORTANT are the following considerations when determining present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) for students′ IEPs?
The IEP is legally compliant.	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
The IEP addresses functional skills.	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
The IEP reflects the South Carolina academic standards.	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education.	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)

The annual IEP goals address all of the students′ needs identified in PLAAFP.	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
The students′ services section of the IEP identifies all of the students′ needs addressed in the PLAAFP.	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
The IEP is written at the student's developmental level.	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
The IEP is written based on the skills deficits identified in the student's psychological report.	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)
The IEP addresses the skills not met on the previous IEP.	*Drop down with descriptors* (Never, rarely, very often, always)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)	*Drop down with descriptors* (Not at all, slightly, moderately, extremely)

Section 4: School, District, or State-Supplied Mandatory Assessment Procedures or Materials

This section consists of questions about district and school procedures and materials for students with severe disabilities. Indicate whether the following procedures or materials are required for students with severe disabilities.

My district requires the use of the following state-supplied materials for curriculum development (check all that apply)
Attainment
Unique Learning Systems Core Rubric
Unique Learning Systems K-12 Benchmark Assessments
Other (please specify)

Indicate your overall satisfaction with state-supplied materials for curriculum development.				
	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Attainment				
Unique Learning Systems Core Rubric				
Unique Learning Systems K-12 Benchmark Assessments				

Indicate your perceived opinion on how the following assessment materials prepare students with severe disabilities for better post-secondary outcomes.				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Attainment				
Unique Learning Systems Core Rubric				
Unique Learning Systems K-12 Benchmark Assessments				

Section 5: Teacher Demographics

Gender *Male* *Female*

Age _____

Highest Educational Degree
Less than a Bachelors Degree
Bachelors
Masters
Masters + 30 hours
Doctoral

Check all of your teaching certification(s) as represented on your teaching certificate. *(Check all that apply.)*

Sp. Ed. – Behavior Disorders
Sp. Ed. – Deafness and Hearing Impairments
Sp. Ed. – Emotional Disabilities
Sp. Ed. – Generic Special Education
Sp. Ed. – Learning Disabilities
Sp. Ed. – Multi-Categorical
Sp. Ed. – Orthopedically Impaired
Sp. Ed. – Severe Disabilities
Sp. Ed. – Visual Impairments
Sp. Ed. – Mental (Intellectual) Disabilities
Other (Please specify)

Including this year, how many years have you taught on a full-time basis? *Drop down of numbers*

Including this year, how many years have you taught students with severe disabilities on a full-time basis?
Drop down of numbers

Indicate your highest educational degree.
High School Diploma/ GED
Associate's Degree
Bachelor's Degree
Master's Degree
Doctoral Degree

Which of the following best describes your school? *Please mark all that apply:*
Elementary school
Middle school

High school
Special school for students with disabilities
Virtual School
Other (please specify)

What is the size of your school?
Less than 500 students
501-1000 students
1001-1500 students
1501-2000 students
Over 2001 students

What grade(s) do you teach currently? Check all that apply.
Preschool
K – 2nd grade
3rd – 5th grade
6th – 8th grade
9th – 12th grade

Including you, how many special education teachers are in your school? *Drop down of numbers*

What setting best describes where you serve the students on your caseload?
Inclusion in the regular education classroom
Pull-out resource classroom
Self-contained classroom

How many students do you serve on your caseload? *Drop down of numbers*

How many paraprofessionals do you have assigned to work with you?
0 paraprofessionals
1 paraprofessional
2 paraprofessionals
3 or more paraprofessionals

What type of training have you had specifically related to students with severe disabilities? (check all that apply)
Workshops
Online courses
Conferences
University or college training
No training
Other (please specify)

APPENDIX B

ADDITIONAL GRAPHS

Table B.1

Additional Demographics of Respondents

Category	n	% (n=474)
Grades Taught		
P	20	4.2
K-2	135	28.5
3-5	194	40.9
6-8	157	33.1
9-12	167	35.2
Paraprofessionals Working With		
No response	16	3.4
0	22	4.6
1	143	30.2
2	188	39.7
3 or more	105	22.2
Type of Training		
Workshops	320	68.1
Online courses	216	46.0
Conferences	299	63.6
University or college teaching	365	77.7
Other	40	8.5

Table B.2

Summary of Teacher Characteristics

Variable	n	Mean	Median
Age	437	43.3	44.0
Years Taught	423	15.3	13.0
Years Taught students with severe disabilities	436	11.0	7.0
Number of students on caseload	430	10.3	9.0
Number of training types marked	470	2.6	3.0
Number of special education certifications marked	474	2.1	2.0

Table B.3

Response Distributions for Assessment Methods' Frequency of Use

Survey Item	Response 1N %	2 R %	3 VO %	4 A %	N
1. Observation in the general education classroom	33.5	36.0	15.8	14.8	481
2. An ecological inventory of the student's home	48.4	35.6	12.4	3.6	477
3. A preference assessment	6.3	30.2	38.5	25.0	480
4. A task analysis of academic skills (e.g., teaching how to write letters)	4.6	19.1	36.2	40.1	481
5. An ecological inventory of the student's local community	33.0	39.5	18.8	8.8	479
6. A task analysis of functional skills (e.g., washing hands)	4.6	16.4	29.9	49.2	482
7. An ecological inventory of the student's future environment	30.4	33.5	23.5	12.5	480
8. A commercially-made assessment (e.g., Unique learning systems, Attainment)	6.0	21.0	34.4	38.5	480
9. Observation of the student in the special education classroom	1.1	1.7	11.1	86.1	476
10. An ecological inventory of the general education classroom	34.7	37.2	17.6	10.5	476
11. Observation of the student in the community	30.5	48.5	14.4	6.5	478
12. Observation of the student in the home	75.6	19.2	3.8	1.5	480
13. Parental input	0.6	8.9	40.5	50.0	482

Table B.4

Summary Statistics for Assessment Methods' Frequency of Use

Survey Items	Negative Responses (N or R) %	Positive Responses (VO or A) %	Responses Mean	Responses SD
1. Observation in the general education classroom	69.4	30.6	2.1	1.0
2. An ecological inventory of the student's home	84.1	15.9	1.7	0.8
3. A preference assessment	36.5	63.5	2.8	0.9
4. A task analysis of academic skills (e.g., teaching how to write letters)	23.7	76.3	3.1	0.9
5. An ecological inventory of the student's local community	72.4	27.6	2.0	0.9
6. A task analysis of functional skills (e.g., washing hands)	21.0	79.0	3.2	0.9
7. An ecological inventory of the student's future environment	64.0	36.0	2.2	1.0
8. A commercially-made assessment (e.g., Unique learning systems, Attainment)	27.1	72.9	3.1	0.9
9. Observation of the student in the special education classroom	2.7	97.3	3.8	0.5
10. An ecological inventory of the general education classroom	71.8	28.2	2.0	1.0
11. Observation of the student in the community	79.1	20.9	2.0	0.8
12. Observation of the student in the home	94.8	5.2	1.3	0.6
13. Parental input	9.5	90.5	3.4	0.7

Table B.5

Response Distributions for Assessment Methods' Importance

Survey Item	Response 1 N %	2 S %	3 M %	4 E %	N
1. Observation in the general education classroom	17.3	23.2	25.1	34.5	475
2. An ecological inventory of the student's home	12.1	25.4	39.6	22.9	472
3. A preference assessment	2.5	11.7	41.1	44.7	477
4. A task analysis of academic skills (e.g., teaching how to write letters)	3.4	8.8	33.5	54.3	477
5. An ecological inventory of the student's local community	7.4	32.6	38.8	21.2	472
6. A task analysis of functional skills (e.g., washing hands)	1.5	7.4	21.6	69.5	476
7. An ecological inventory of the student's future environment	6.9	18.5	36.2	38.3	475
8. A commercially-made assessment (e.g., Unique learning systems, Attainment)	2.5	19.5	39.6	38.4	477
9. Observation of the student in the special education classroom	0.4	1.3	14.3	84.1	477
10. An ecological inventory of the general education classroom	14.9	32.0	30.9	22.1	475
11. Observation of the student in the community	7.0	22.4	40.7	30.0	474
12. Observation of the student in the home	14.6	32.8	34.7	17.8	478
13. Parental input	0.0	2.5	23.4	74.1	482

Table B.6

Summary Statistics for Assessment Methods' Importance

Survey Items	Negative Responses (N or S) %	Positive Responses (M or E) %	Responses	
			Mean	SD
1. Observation in the general education classroom	40.4	59.6	2.8	1.1
2. An ecological inventory of the student's home	37.5	62.5	2.7	0.9
3. A preference assessment	14.3	85.7	3.3	0.8
4. A task analysis of academic skills (e.g., teaching how to write letters)	12.2	87.8	3.4	0.8
5. An ecological inventory of the student's local community	40.0	60.0	2.7	0.9
6. A task analysis of functional skills (e.g., washing hands)	8.8	91.2	3.6	0.7
7. An ecological inventory of the student's future environment	25.5	74.5	3.1	0.9
8. A commercially-made assessment (e.g., Unique learning systems, Attainment)	22.0	78.0	3.1	0.8
9. Observation of the student in the special education classroom	1.7	98.3	3.8	0.4
10. An ecological inventory of the general education classroom	46.9	53.1	2.6	1.0
11. Observation of the student in the community	29.3	70.7	2.9	0.9
12. Observation of the student in the home	47.5	52.5	2.6	0.9
13. Parental input	2.5	97.5	3.7	0.5

Table B.7

Response Distributions for IEP Considerations' Frequency of Use

	Response				
	1N	2 R	3 VO	4 A	
Survey Item	%	%	%	%	N
1. The IEP is legally compliant.	0.2	0.4	4.6	94.8	480
2. The IEP addresses functional skills.	0.4	4.2	12.3	83.2	481
3. The IEP reflects the South Carolina academic standards.	3.8	23.0	27.6	45.7	479
4. The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education.	0.4	0.4	6.7	92.5	478
5. The annual IEP goals address all of the students' needs identified in PLAAFP.	0.4	2.1	14.1	83.4	481
6. The students' services section of the IEP identifies all of the students' needs addressed in the PLAAFP.	0.2	1.3	12.5	86.0	479
7. The IEP is written at the student's developmental level.	1.3	4.0	11.3	83.5	480
8. The IEP is written based on the skills deficits identified in the student's psychological report.	4.0	25.1	29.2	41.8	479
9. The IEP addresses the skills not met on the previous IEP.	1.5	18.3	35.8	44.4	480

Table B.8

Summary Statistics for IEP Considerations' Frequency of Use

Survey Items	Negative Responses (N or R) %	Positive Responses (VO or A) %	Responses	
			Mean	SD
1. The IEP is legally compliant.	0.6	99.4	3.9	0.3
2. The IEP addresses functional skills.	4.6	95.4	3.8	0.5
3. The IEP reflects the South Carolina academic standards.	26.7	73.3	3.2	0.9
4. The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education.	0.8	99.2	3.9	0.3
5. The annual IEP goals address all of the students' needs identified in PLAAFP.	2.5	97.5	3.8	0.5
6. The students' services section of the IEP identifies all of the students' needs addressed in the PLAAFP.	1.5	98.5	3.8	0.4
7. The IEP is written at the student's developmental level.	5.2	94.8	3.8	0.6
8. The IEP is written based on the skills deficits identified in the student's psychological report.	29.0	71.0	3.1	0.9
9. The IEP addresses the skills not met on the previous IEP.	19.8	80.2	3.2	0.8

Table B.9

Response Distributions for IEP Considerations' Importance

Survey Item	Response 1 N %	2 S %	3 M %	4 E %	N
1. The IEP is legally compliant.	0.4	0.6	4.8	94.2	479
2. The IEP addresses functional skills.	0.6	1.3	8.8	89.4	479
3. The IEP reflects the South Carolina academic standards.	7.9	22.5	30.1	39.5	479
4. The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education.	0.2	0.4	8.2	91.2	475
5. The annual IEP goals address all of the students' needs identified in PLAAFP.	0.4	1.7	14.6	83.4	481
6. The students' services section of the IEP identifies all of the students' needs addressed in the PLAAFP.	0.2	1.7	14.3	83.8	475
7. The IEP is written at the student's developmental level.	0.6	1.7	10.9	86.8	476
8. The IEP is written based on the skills deficits identified in the student's psychological report.	1.9	13.4	34.9	49.8	478
9. The IEP addresses the skills not met on the previous IEP.	0.8	9.2	37.7	52.3	480

Table B.10

Summary Statistics for IEP Considerations' Importance

Survey Items	Negative Responses (N or S) %	Positive Responses (M or E) %	Responses	
			Mean	SD
1. The IEP is legally compliant.	1.0	99.0	3.9	0.3
2. The IEP addresses functional skills.	1.9	98.1	3.9	0.4
3. The IEP reflects the South Carolina academic standards.	30.5	69.5	3.0	1.0
4. The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education.	0.6	99.4	3.9	0.3
5. The annual IEP goals address all of the students' needs identified in PLAAFP.	2.1	97.9	3.8	0.5
6. The students' services section of the IEP identifies all of the students' needs addressed in the PLAAFP.	1.9	98.1	3.8	0.4
7. The IEP is written at the student's developmental level.	2.3	97.7	3.8	0.5
8. The IEP is written based on the skills deficits identified in the student's psychological report.	15.3	84.7	3.3	0.8
9. The IEP addresses the skills not met on the previous IEP.	10.0	90.0	3.4	0.7

Table B.11

Summary Statistics for Assessment Methods' Preparedness

	EI			Not EI			*EI* Mean Minus *Not EI*
Survey Items	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	Mean
1. Observation in the general education classroom	267	3.1	0.9	203	2.8	1.1	0.3
2. An ecological inventory of the student's home	268	2.5	1.0	205	1.7	0.8	**0.8****
3. A preference assessment	268	3.3	0.7	206	3.0	0.9	0.3
4. A task analysis of academic skills (e.g., teaching how to write letters)	266	3.5	0.7	206	3.3	0.7	0.2
5. An ecological inventory of the student's local community	265	2.8	0.9	206	1.9	0.8	**0.9****
6. A task analysis of functional skills (e.g., washing hands)	267	3.6	0.6	204	3.3	0.8	0.3
7. An ecological inventory of the student's future environment	266	2.9	0.9	205	2.0	0.8	**1.0****
8. A commercially-made assessment (e.g., Unique learning systems, Attainment)	267	3.2	0.8	204	3.1	0.9	0.1
9. Observation of the student in the special education classroom	263	3.8	0.4	206	3.8	0.5	0.1
10. An ecological inventory of the general education classroom	265	2.9	1.0	204	2.1	1.0	**0.8****
11. Observation of the student in the community	266	2.8	1.0	205	2.4	1.0	0.3
12. Observation of the student in the home	267	2.1	1.0	204	1.8	0.9	0.3
13. Parental input	266	3.6	0.5	206	3.5	0.6	0.2

Table B.12

Summary Statistics for IEP Process' Usage Frequency

	EI			Not EI			*EI* Mean Minus
Survey Items	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	*Not EI* Mean
1. The IEP is legally compliant.	267	4.0	0.2	205	3.9	0.3	0.0
2. The IEP addresses functional skills.	268	3.8	0.4	205	3.7	0.6	0.1
3. The IEP reflects the South Carolina academic standards.	265	3.3	0.9	206	3.0	0.9	0.3
4. The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education.	265	3.9	0.3	205	3.9	0.3	0.0
5. The annual IEP goals address all of the students' needs identified in PLAAFP.	268	3.8	0.5	205	3.8	0.4	0.0
6. The students' services section of the IEP identifies all of the students' needs addressed in the PLAAFP.	265	3.9	0.4	206	3.8	0.4	0.0
7. The IEP is written at the student's developmental level.	267	3.8	0.6	205	3.7	0.6	0.0
8. The IEP is written based on the skills deficits identified in the student's psychological report.	267	3.2	0.9	204	3.0	0.9	0.2
9. The IEP addresses the skills not met on the previous IEP.	267	3.3	0.8	206	3.2	0.8	0.0

Table B.13

Summary Statistics for IEP Process' Preparedness

Survey Items	EI N	EI Mean	EI SD	Not EI N	Not EI Mean	Not EI SD	*EI* Mean Minus *Not EI* Mean
1. The IEP is legally compliant.	267	3.8	0.4	205	3.7	0.5	0.1
2. The IEP addresses functional skills.	267	3.8	0.4	206	3.6	0.7	0.2
3. The IEP reflects the South Carolina academic standards.	265	3.3	0.8	206	3.0	0.8	0.3
4. The IEP team uses the needs identified in the present levels statements in planning the student's program of special education.	265	3.8	0.5	205	3.8	0.4	0.0
5. The annual IEP goals address all of the students' needs identified in PLAAFP.	266	3.7	0.5	205	3.7	0.5	0.0
6. The students' services section of the IEP identifies all of the students' needs addressed in the PLAAFP.	266	3.8	0.5	205	3.7	0.5	0.0
7. The IEP is written at the student's developmental level.	265	3.7	0.5	205	3.7	0.6	0.0
8. The IEP is written based on the skills deficits identified in the student's psychological report.	267	3.3	0.8	203	3.1	0.9	0.2
9. The IEP addresses the skills not met on the previous IEP.	267	3.4	0.7	206	3.4	0.7	0.1

Table B.14

Summary of t-Test Results

Survey Items	EI Mean	EI SD	Not EI Mean	Not EI SD	Mean Diff*	df	t
Assessment Methods' Usage Frequency							
1. Observation in the general education classroom	2.4	1.0	1.8	0.9	0.6	471	5.87**
6. A task analysis of functional skills (e.g., washing hands)	3.4	0.8	3.0	0.9	0.5	472	5.67**
Assessment Methods' Importance							
1. Observation in the general education classroom	3.0	1.0	2.5	1.1	0.5	465	5.10**
2. An ecological inventory of the student's home	3.0	0.9	2.4	0.9	0.6	464	7.44**
5. An ecological inventory of the student's local community	3.0	0.8	2.4	0.8	0.6	463	7.94**
7. An ecological inventory of the student's future environment	3.4	0.7	2.6	0.9	0.8	365 .27	9.52**
10. An ecological inventory of the general education classroom	2.9	1.0	2.3	0.9	0.6	467	7.00**
Assessment Methods' Preparedness							
2. An ecological inventory of the student's home	2.5	1.0	1.7	0.8	0.8	396 .26	3.43***
5. An ecological inventory of the student's local community	2.8	0.9	1.9	0.8	0.9	469	10.53**
7. An ecological inventory of the student's future environment	2.9	0.9	2.0	0.8	1.0	469	12.39**
10. An ecological inventory of the general education classroom	2.9	1.0	2.1	1.0	0.8	467	8.79**

Note. * Mean difference (*EI* mean minus *Not EI* mean), ** $p < .0001$, *** $p = .0007$